DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 207 450 HE 014 399

AUTHOR Rogers, George W., Jr.
TITLE Nontraditional, Female, Commuter Students: Coping with College.
PUB DATE [81]
NOTE 9p.

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Adult Students; *Coping; Family Counseling; *Females; Higher Education; *Nontraditional Students; Relaxation Training; *Student Adjustment; *Student Personnel Services; Test Anxiety; Womens Studies

ABSTRACT

The unique needs of nontraditional, female, commuter students at Northern Kentucky University were examined as a result of active recruitment of nontraditional students in the dwindling market for traditional college students. Women over the age of 25 are entering Northern Kentucky University, bringing unique personal and career problems. Problem areas include: (1) an undue amount of self-inflicted pressure to have all A grades, (2) test anxiety, and (3) a lack of emotional and/or physical support from family members. Northern Kentucky University is attempting to be supportive by offering counseling on realistic academic goals for persons whose academic skills may be rusty from lack of use; on reduction of test anxiety through rational-emotive therapy, relaxation training, systematic desensitization, and the Learning Assistance Center with reading, writing, mathematics, and study skill tutoring; and on family support of the female returning to the campus. A family meeting or council may be necessary as a period of exchanging ideas and as a time to outline goals, dreams, and the need for family support. It is argued that the nontraditional student needs an extensive period of orientation to college with an emphasis on setting realistic academic goals. In addition, campus support groups and counseling groups may be useful for intervention with possible family difficulties resulting from this quest for higher education. The students who can take hold of their lives, realistically evaluate their skills and capabilities, and utilize campus resources can probably overcome most adversities and make their college experience both positive and fruitful. (CC)

**********
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
**********

ED207450

HE

# Nontraditional, Female, Commuter Students: Coping with College

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☐ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official NIE position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

George W. Rogers Jr.

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

Dr. George W. Rogers, Jr., Director
Testing and Psychological Services
Northern Kentucky University
Highland Heights, Kentucky 41076

HE 014 399

Three problem areas have emerged as being associated with many of the nontraditional female students who attend Northern Kentucky University. Many of these students are finding college difficult to cope with because of one or more of the following: 1) An undue amount of self-inflicted pressure to obtain perfect grades; 2) test anxiety; or 3) a lack of emotional and/or physical support from other family members. Methods for dealing with these problem areas are discussed along with some suggestions for meeting the unique needs of nontraditional, female, commuter students.

Nontraditional, Female, Commuter Students:
Coping with College

Over the past few years there has been a great increase in the number of women attending colleges and universities who are beyond the age of 25. Because of the great competition for students in a dwindling market, admissions officers are now actively recruiting nontraditional students: the older woman, the foreign student, the continuing education student, housewives, and part-time students (Westoff, 1980). Therefore, one can assume that present trends will continue with increasing numbers of nontraditional, females entering college.

These trends have been much in evidence at Northern Kentucky University over the past few years. The present student body of nearly 10,000 includes among its ranks about 50 percent nontraditional students. Roughly half of this number now includes women over the age of 25. Paralleling these changes, there has been an increase in the number of female clients, over the age of 25, who visit the Office of Testing and Psychological Services at Northern Kentucky University. They seek aid and assistance for a variety of difficulities including: 1) personal problems, 2) personal growth or exploration, 3) choosing a major, or 4) choosing a career. Three major problem areas have noticeably emerged as being associated with many of Northern's nontraditional, female students. These problem areas are: 1) An undue amount of self-inflicted pressure

to have all "A's"; 2) test anxiety; and 3) a lack of emotional and/or physical support from other family members.

Too frequently our nontraditional female students seem to put an unrealistic amount of pressure upon themselves to have a perfect grade point average (4.00). Such an accomplishment is difficult enough for a well-prepared traditional student but near impossible for the person who has done literally nothing of an academic nature for a number of years. With these clients, a rational-emotive approach (Ellis & Harper, 1975; Maultsby & Hendricks, 1974) is generally used to encourage the client to logically explore the unrealistic goal of perfection and the realities of their present academic skills. Study skills and techniques, mathematical skills, writing and language skills, and reading skills grow rusty and inefficient from non-use. These facts are made apparent to the nontraditional student who has not practiced such skills for years. They are encouraged to think more rationally and a more appropriate and less anxiety-provoking manner of thinking is suggested, such as, "I have been away from school for many years, my skills are rusty, and I will strive for the best grades that I can achieve. I may not get all 'A's' this semester, but as my study, reading, math, and English skills improve, my grades will probably improve also."

Closely related to this problem area is another "test anxiety." Tests inherently are anxiety-provoking; our knowlege or skills are openly evaluated, and we are judged by someone

else. Tests are particularly anxiety-provoking for those who have limited test-taking experiences or who believe that their performances, scores, or grades must be perfect. Nontraditional students are advised that they can probably best overcome test anxiety by taking more and more tests; however, sometimes other therapeutic techniques and resources are also utilized. Rational-emotive therapy, relaxation training (Bernstein & Borkovec, 1973), or systematic desensitization (Wolpe, 1958) have been used, but some females require help via our Learning Assistance Center with their reading, writing, mathematics, and study skills. Clients are encouraged to view test-taking skills and techniques logically as tasks which must be faced and which will tend to improve as more courses and tests are taken. The nontraditional student is encouraged to view test scores realistically. As long as one equates her value as a person with her test score, then periods of depression are inevitable. Clearly, to assist in the diminution of test anxiety the student must think and believe that a poor test grade does not imply that one is a failure in life just as a passing grade does not imply that one is a great success in life.

The final problem area to be discussed is nonsupport of other family members. When a wife or mother leaves the home for some period of time, often there is some disruption to the family routine. Sometimes her spouse and/or children will adjust easily and assume new or expanded roles. However, sometimes the spouse and/or children do not adjust and even refuse to adjust. Mother is taking a full load of courses yet her

routine at home is not expected to change at all. Some family members, if their lives become somewhat disrupted, may become hostile, noncommunicative, and definitely not supportive of the absent female. Often times, a lack of support can stem from the most absurd situations, such as, 1) daughter now must do dishes two nights a week, or 2) father must wait 30 minutes longer for supper, or 3) the husband feels threatened by his wife's accomplishments. The woman who intends to remain in school may need to take a "firm hand" when dealing with her family. Our counseling in this case tends to be one of support yet one which emphasizes or encourages the wife and/or mother to believe in what she is doing and to have the courage to withstand or confront family pressures. A family meeting or council (Dreikurs, Gould & Corsini, 1974), may be necessary as a period of "give and take" and as a time to outline goals, dreams, and the need for family support.

As a unit Northern Kentucky University attempts to be supportive of nontraditional students, and we have a number of offices which offer specific services to such students. Those working with nontraditional females, in particular, may be dealing with a unique group with very unique problems. This group would seem to require an extensive period of orientation to college with an emphasis on setting realistic academic goals. In addition, campus support groups and counseling groups may be useful for dealing with possible family difficulties resulting from this quest for higher education. Those students who can take hold of their lives, realistically evaluate their skills and

capabilities, and utilize campus resources can probably overcome most adversities and make their college experience both positive and fruitful.

References

Bernstein, D.A., & Borkovec, T.D. Progressive relaxation training. Champaign, Illinois: Research Press, 1973.

Dreikurs, R., Gould, S., & Corsini, R.J. Family council. Chicago: Henry Regnery, 1974.

Ellis, A., & Harper, R.A. A new guide to rational living. North Hollywood, California: Wilshire Book Company, 1975.

Maultsby, M.C., & Hendricks, A. You and your emotions. Lexington, Kentucky: University of Kentucky, 1974.

Westoff, L.A. A new era in admissions. Focus, 1980, 7, 1-24.

Wolpe, J. Psychotherapy by reciprocal inhibition. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1958.